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12 June 2008

UZB102839.E

Uzbekistan: Alternatives to military service; whether conscientious objection is recognized
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Article 52 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan states that all citizens are required to perform military or alternative service "in accordance with the procedure prescribed by law" (Uzbekistan 8 Dec. 1992). A law on "Universal Military Duty" entered into force in December 2002 (US Jan. 2003, 11; Fluri and Malek Jan. 2008, 135).

A representative of War Resisters' International (WRI), an organization dedicated to non-violent action which offers support to individuals who refuse to participate in war (WRI n.d.), stated that the law on military duty contains provisions for alternative service as decided by the conscription board of the military commissariat under Article 37(2), but that conscientious objection is only permitted to members of "recognised religions" (WRI 6 May 2008). The Representative indicated that it is unclear which religions are officially recognized and what criteria exist to determine who qualifies as conscientious objectors (WRI 6 May 2008). Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) indicates that a 31 May 2003 report by uzreport.com quoted the State Religious Affairs Committee Chairman as saying that Jehovah's Witnesses, Evangelical Christian-Baptists and Seventh Day Adventists are eligible for alternative service (RFE/RL 2 June 2003). The United States (US) Department of State notes that Jehovah's Witnesses routinely receive exemptions from the conscription board (US 8 Nov. 2005).

According to the State Religious Affairs Committee Chairman quoted by uzreport.com, alternative service involves mandatory training in a military skill that does not require the bearing of arms (RFE/RL 2 June 2003), and includes the provision of emergency relief and unskilled labour in a variety of social and economic sectors (ibid.). However, the Representative of WRI stated that alternative service is not "genuinely civilian" as it includes two months of basic military training (WRI 6 May 2008).

Regular service lasts for one year (ibid.; US Jan. 2003, 11; Eurasianet 22 Feb. 2003) whereas alternative service requires a commitment of two years (RFE/RL 2 June 2003; WRI 6 May 2008). According to Conscience and Peace Tax International (CPTI), a non-governmental organization which "aims to obtain recognition of the right to conscientious objection to paying for armaments and war preparation and war conduct through taxes" (CPTI n.d.a), the salary for performing alternative service is 80 percent of that received for regular service (CPTI n.d.b). The Representative of WRI added that the other 20 percent goes to the Ministry of Defence (WRI 6 May 2008). CPTI indicates that a legal provision exists whereby the option to complete a brief training period may be "purchased for cash" as an alternative to performing military service (CPTI 2006). Further information on this option could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

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Uzbekistan. 8 December 1992. Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan. <<http://www.umid.uz/Main/Uzbekistan/Constitution/constitution.html>> [Accessed 5 May 2008]

War Resisters' International (WRI). 6 May 2008. Correspondence received from a representative.

_____. N.d. "A Nonviolent Movement to End War." <<http://www.wri-irg.org/wri.htm>> [Accessed 10 June 2008]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: An official at the Embassy of Canada in Moscow, Russia, which represents Canadian interests in Uzbekistan, was unable to respond within the time constraints of this Response

Internet sources, including: Amnesty International (AI), Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Factiva, Forum 18, Equal Rights Trust, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), Human Rights Watch (HRW), International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Umid World, uzreport.com

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